'Religion In America, 1985' Report To Highlight 50 Years Of Trends

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Also included are demographic profiles of major faiths and denominations, as well as changes in religious preference and identification.

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Here are four important reasons why these annual reports on religion in America have proved so popular:

1. They are an invaluable source of information on religious beliefs and practices in the U.S. and abroad, much of which is not available elsewhere.

2. They provide national and regional norms against which the clergy can match their own churches and synagogues in terms of religious belief, practice, knowledge and stewardship.

3. They provide new and exciting information that can be developed into sermons or articles on the state of religion.

4. They provide data indispensable for future planning: What are the new religious interests of church members and non-members? Where does the public think churches are falling short?

HOW TO ORDER

RELIGION IN AMERICA, 1985 can be ordered from The Gallup Organization, Inc. P.O. Box 310, Princeton, New Jersey 08542. The cost of the 1985 report is $25.00.

EMERGING TRENDS is published monthly except July and August by the PRINCETON RELIGION RESEARCH CENTER. The Center, founded in 1977, is an inter-faith non-denominational research organization with headquarters in Princeton, New Jersey. The PRRC specializes in creative, actionable research, utilizing the worldwide attitudinal and behavioral facilities of Gallup International. The purpose of the PRRC is to gain a better understanding of the nature and depth of religious commitment in the U.S. and abroad and to explore ways this information can enable religious leaders to promote spiritual growth. A one year subscription can be obtained for $30; inquire: **Publications Department, P.O. Box 310, 53 Bank Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08542 (Telephone: 609/924-9600) PLEASE NOTIFY US OF ADDRESS CHANGE.**

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7/22/15 R8780-1

PRRC emerging trends

May 85

Published by the Princeton Religion Research Center Vol. 7, No. 5

4 in 10 Americans Have Had Unusual Spiritual Experiences

PRINCETON, N.J. — A remarkable 43% of Americans have had unusual and inexplicable spiritual or religious experiences, as determined by a recent nationwide Gallup survey.

These experiences cover a wide range—from nature-inspired feelings of awe, to answered prayers, to out-of-body experiences—and generally have had a profound and positive impact on people's lives.

Said a 44-year-old New Jersey man, one of 672 persons reporting unusual experiences: "I was the only survivor in my company in Vietnam. I feel I walk with God every day."

A 53-year-old man from New England told the Gallup Poll reporter: "I was drowning and a guy pulled me out. When he asked me how I could see him, I said 'from above.' I felt as if I was outside my body."

"I was very ill 15 years ago," said a 60-year-old housewife from New York, who woke up one summer day and "felt the presence of Jesus in the room."

33% IN BRITAIN CITE EXPERIENCES

When the same question was asked by the Gallup affiliate in Great Britain, 33% replied affirmatively, a figure that almost exactly matches the percentage recorded in an earlier survey conducted by the Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College, Oxford (now the Alistair Hardy Research Center).

Following is the question asked in both the U.S. and Great Britain:

Have you ever been aware of, or influenced by, a presence or a power—whether you call it God or not—which is different from your everyday self?

As the following table shows, American women are more likely than men to report such experiences, as are persons over 30, those who attended college, and persons who say religion is very important in their lives:

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES
(Percent feeling presence)

TOTAL U.S.	43%
Men	38
Women	47
18-29 years	36
30-49 years	47
50 & older	42
East	40
Midwest	41
South	43
West	47
College grads.	50
College inc.	47
High school grads.	39
Not H.S. grads.	37
Protestants	48
Catholics	37
Southern Baptists	52
Methodists	48
Lutherans	43
Religion very important in life	50
Fairly important	38
Not very important	24

Those in the U.S. survey who said they had had spiritual experiences were asked to describe them. Many felt the presence of God or received help from God. Others indicated the experience was essentially indescribable. Here is the full list of responses:

(continued on page 2)

DESCRIPTIONS OF SPIRITUAL PRESENCE
(Based on those feeling presence)

Presence of God	21%
Guidance, help from God	11
Indescribable feeling	11
Calming, comforting	10
Contentment, peace, well-being	7
At time of illness	6
Answer to prayer	6
Like E.S.P., intuition	5
Guardian	4
Gave me strength	3
Conscience	3
A light	2
All others	6
Don't know	5
	100%

These people were also asked what effect the experience had on their lives. The responses were almost invariably positive, with most saying it "strengthened my faith in God" (15%), "gave me strength for living" (14%), and "made me a better person" (10%).

Here are some typical responses: "It keeps me from going bananas" . . . "When I lie down at night I know it's worth getting up in the morning" . . . "I have more confidence that things are going to work out for the best" . . . "The experience was so profound, I've made major decisions on it" . . . "It helped me believe in myself" . . . "It put me in a more aware posture of life and not pursuing the almighty dollar" . . .

Here is the full list of responses:

EFFECT ON LIFE
(Based on those feeling presence)

Strengthened my belief in God	15%
Gave me strength for living	14
Made me a better person	10
Had positive effect (general)	8
Made me appreciate life more	8
Had no effect	7
Made me more understanding of others	6
Made me a happier person	5
Gave me peace of mind	4
Helped me make decisions	4
Helped in discerning right from wrong	4
Gave me hope	3
Improved family life	3
Made me thankful	2
Made me reassess my life	2
Gave me more self confidence	2
Made me feel more religious	2
All others	6
Don't know	10
	115%*

*Adds to more than 100% due to multiple responses.

On May 14 Sir Alistair Hardy, an 89-year-old British marine biologist, received the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion for his collection and analysis of extraordinary religious experiences. Since receiving the award Sir Alistair has died. It was his hope that studies on religious and spiritual experiences will help reduce tension and struggle between various religions in the world, as people come to realize they are all part of the same God.

The U.S. findings are based on in-person interviews with 1,525 adults, 18 and older, 672 of whom reported having had spiritual experiences. The interviews were conducted in over 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period April 12-15. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 3 percentage points in either direction. Results based on the group who reported spiritual experiences are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus 5 points.

In addition to sampling error, the reader should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

73% in U.S. Say the Church is Answering Man's Spiritual Needs

Three Americans in every four (73%) hold the view that the church in the U.S. is giving adequate answers to "man's spiritual needs." One person in seven (14%) disagrees while another 13% do not express an opinion.

These findings are from a survey conducted in 1981 in 14 nations by Gallup International Research Institutes (GIRI) for the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) and the European Value System Study Group.

Americans are more positive about the church than are persons in all of the other 13 nations surveyed, as seen in the following table:

Generally speaking, do you think that your church is giving, in your country, adequate answers to...man's spiritual needs?

	Yes	No	Don't know
United States	73%	14%	13%
Republic of Ireland	64	24	12
Northern Ireland	60	24	15
Finland	58	21	21
Norway	50	28	22
France	48	37	15
West Germany	47	33	20
Spain	45	37	18
Italy	43	29	28
Great Britain	42	32	26
Belgium	40	29	31
Sweden	37	35	29
Netherlands	33	29	38
Denmark	26	45	29

Note: Results do not add to 100% due to rounding or no response.

Majority Now Considers Premarital Sex Acceptable

For the first time in the 16 years the topic has been studied, a majority of U.S. adults considers premarital sex acceptable. As recently as 1969, a commanding two-thirds' majority felt sex before marriage was wrong.

In a recent Gallup Poll, 52% say premarital sex is not wrong while 39% say it is wrong. When the question was first asked, in 1969, 68% said it was wrong and 21% not wrong.

Although a pronounced shift toward greater acceptance has occurred in all major population segments, majorities of persons 50 and older and those whose formal education ended at the grade school level continue to disapprove of premarital sex.

In addition to age and education, significant differences are found on the basis of gender, religious preference and geographic region. Men, for instance, are less likely than women to consider premarital sex unacceptable, with 32% of men compared to 44% of women saying it is wrong. Similarly, while Protestants are evenly divided on the issue, with 46% feeling premarital sex is wrong and 44% not wrong, Catholics lean strongly to the liberal viewpoint, with 33% saying it is wrong and 59% not wrong.

Majorities in every region except the South take the position that premarital sex is not wrong. Southerners are closely divided, with 48% saying it is wrong and 44% not wrong.

Following is the question asked and the trend:

There's a lot of discussion about the way morals and sexual attitudes are changing in this country. What is your opinion about this: do you think it is wrong for a man and a woman to have sex relations before marriage, or not?

PREMARITAL SEX

	Wrong %	Not wrong %	No opinion %
April 12-15..	39	52	9
1973.....	48	43	9
1969.....	68	21	11

Following is a comparison of those disapproving of premarital sex in both the 1969 and 1985 surveys:

PREMARITAL SEX
(Percent disapproving)

	1985 %	1969 %	Difference since '69 %
NATIONAL.....	39	68	−29
Men	32	62	−30
Women	44	74	−30
18-29 years.....	18	49	−31
30-49 years.....	35	67	−32
50 & older.....	56	80	−24
Protestants.....	46	70	−24
Catholics	33	72	−39
College education.	31	56	−25
High school	40	69	−29
Grade school.....	60	77	−17
East	40	65	−25
Midwest	36	69	−33
South.....	48	78	−30
West.....	24	55	−31

Persons in the current survey who say religion is very important in their lives tend to believe that premarital sex is wrong (54%) rather than not wrong (36%). On the other hand, large majorities of those who say religion is only fairly important (66%), or not important (80%), feel sex before marriage is acceptable.

		Importance of Religion in Life		
Premarital Sex	Total	Very important	Fairly important	Not very important
	(100%)	(54%)	(30%)	(15%)
Wrong	39%	54%	25%	13%
Not wrong	52	36	66	80
No opinion	9	10	9	7
	100%	100%	100%	100%

The latest results are based on in-person interviews with 1,525 adults, 18 and older, conducted in over 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period April 12-15. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 3 percentage points in either direction.

In addition to sampling error, the reader should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Methodists Have Highest Percentage of 'Unchurched'

The highest proportion of "unchurched" among the nation's largest denominations is found among the Methodists.

In addition, the highest percentages of unchurched—those who have worshipped fewer than two times in a 12-month test period—are found among men (39%), younger adults (36%), westerners (41%), persons with less than a high school education (39%), and those who say religion is not very important in their lives (81%).

Here is the question asked in two successive surveys conducted for the Paulist National Catholic Evangelistic Association in January and February, with 3,050 adults:

During the last 12 months, have you worshipped two times or more in the church or synagogue of your choice, if you have one? In your response, do not include weddings, funerals, Christmas, Easter, or a High Holy Day.

CHURCHED OR UNCHURCHED?

	Churched %	Unchurched %
NATIONAL	67	33
Catholics	76	24
Protestants (Total)	70	30
All Baptists	76	24
Southern Baptists	79	21
Methodists	65	35
Men	61	39
Women	73	27
18-24 years	64	36
25-29 years	64	36
30-49 years	65	35
50-64 years	71	29
65 & older	71	29
East	63	37
Midwest	69	31
South	74	26
West	59	41
Whites	66	34
Blacks	75	25
Hispanics	70	30
College grads.	69	31
College inc.	68	32
High school grads.	69	31
Less than H.S. grads.	61	39
Family income:		
$20,000 and over	69	31
Under $20,000	65	35
Importance of religion:		
Very important	84	16
Fairly important	58	42
Not very important	19	81

Americans, Irish Most Likely To Get Comfort from Religion

Americans and residents of the Republic of Ireland are the most likely to get comfort and support from religion, as determined by a 1981 survey conducted in 13 nations by GIRI for CARA, and the European Value System Study Group.

Least likely to say they receive comfort and support are the Danes and the Swedes.

Here is the question:

Do you find that you get comfort and strength from religion, or not?

Following are the results from each participating nation:

COMFORT FROM RELIGION

	Yes %	No %	No opinion %
United States	79	17	4
Republic of Ireland	79	17	5
Northern Ireland	70	22	7
Italy	63	30	7
Spain	57	34	9
Belgium	47	32	20
Great Britain	46	49	5
West Germany	44	39	14
Netherlands	43	44	13
Norway	40	38	22
France	37	57	6
Denmark	29	60	11
Sweden	27	63	10

Note: Results sometimes do not add to 100% due to rounding or no response.

Teens Read, Look, Listen More than Older Generation

According to a recent Gallup Youth Survey, teenagers are more likely to resemble their parents when it comes to reading newspapers than is true for any other medium.

Three in 4 teens (76%) say they spend about the same amount of time as their parents reading newspapers. Although 5% say they spend more time with the paper, 19% report spending less time.

A majority of teens say they spend the same amount of time as their parents reading magazines (54%) or books (53%), but comparatively fewer teens report they follow their parents' use of radio (8%) or television (30%).

While adults fret about teens' use of television, radio is becoming the medium that separates the generations. Three in 4 teens (77%) say they spend more time than their parents listening to radio. Younger teens, ages 13 to 15, are the most likely to say they spend more time with radio (80%). Regionally, radio listenership is highest in the East (83%) and lowest in the West (65%).

Almost half of the teens (47%) say they watch television more, but 23% believe they spend less time than their parents watching the tube. Least likely to report spending more time watching television are older teens (42%) and those who do above-average work in school (44%).

Teens are more likely to say they are spending more time (30%) reading books than their parents (17%). Reports of greater reading are more frequent among young women (37%) than among young men (22%). Not surprisingly, above-average students (36%) are more likely than others (24%) to report that their book-reading time exceeds the family norm.

Young women are also more likely than young men to say they spend more time than their parents reading magazines, by a margin of 32% to 19%. Little difference in increased magazine readership is noted, however, according to such characteristics as age, academic performance, or region.

One teen in 20 (5%) reports greater newspaper readership. The proportion saying they spend more time than their parents reading newspapers rises to 11% in the South, but in the West teens say they spend the same amount of time or less than their parents. On the downside, one teen in 5 (19%) reports spending less time reading newspapers.

Here is the question:

Do you think you spend more time, less time, or about the same amount of time than your parents—watching television, listening to radio, reading newspapers, reading magazines, reading books?

The findings are based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross section of 500 teenagers, 13 through 18, conducted from July through September 1984.

TIME SPENT BY TEENS COMPARED TO PARENTS

	More %	Same %	Less %
Radio	77	8	15
Television	47	30	23
Books	30	53	17
Magazines	25	54	21
Newspapers	5	76	19

TEENS REPORTING GREATER USE OF MEDIA THAN PARENTS

	Radio %	TV %	Books %	Magazines %	Newspapers %
NATIONAL	77	47	30	25	5
Boys	75	49	22	19	6
Girls	79	45	37	32	4
Ages 13 to 15	80	52	31	24	4
Ages 16 to 18	74	42	29	26	6
Above-average students	77	44	36	27	6
Average or below	77	50	24	24	4
East	83	51	34	29	6
Midwest	77	45	28	22	2
South	78	49	30	27	11
West	65	41	26	24	*

*Less than one percent.

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